

# Semantics and Pragmatics

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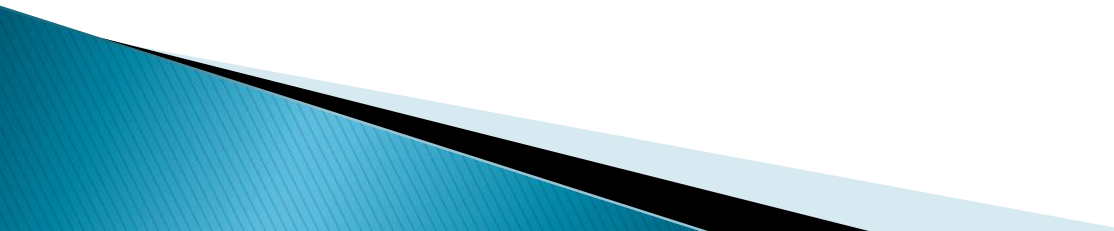
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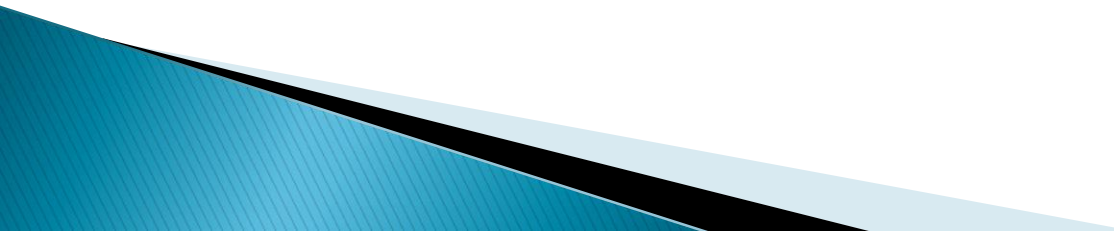
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Second Semester

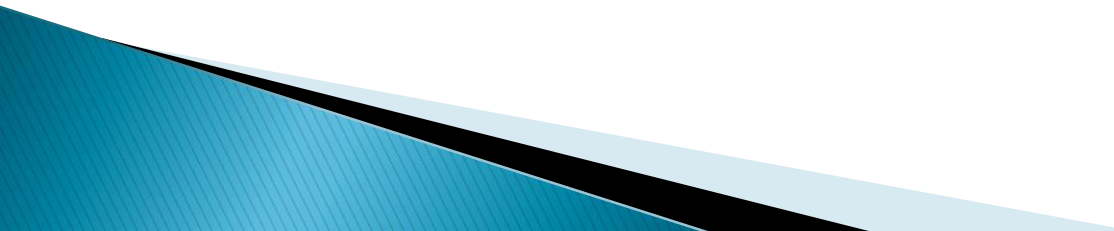
# ► Introduction

# Definitions

- ▶ **Semantics** is the study of meaning in Language. It concentrates on meaning that comes from purely linguistic knowledge.
  - ▶ **Pragmatics** is the study of how language is used in communication. It concentrates on those aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and takes into account knowledge about the physical and social world.
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- ▶ Topics Included Under Semantics:
  - ▶ Introduction:
  - ▶ Meaning covers a variety of aspects of language, and there is no general agreement about the nature of meaning, what aspects of it may properly be included in semantics, or the way in which it should be described.
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# The topics included in this course under semantics are:

1. Lexical semantics
  2. Structural Semantics
    - ❖ collocation
    - ❖ Semantic field
    - ❖ Sense relations:  
hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy,  
polysemy, etc.
  3. Componential analysis
  4. Language universals
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# The terms **semantics** and **meaning**

- ▶ The term **semantics**:
- ▶ The term semantics is a recent addition to the English language.
- ❖ It was introduced in a paper read to the American Philological Association in 1894 entitled “Reflected meanings: a point in semantics”.
- ❖ The French term *sémantique* had been coined from the Greek in the previous year by M. Bréal.  
In both cases the term was not used to refer to meaning, but to its development—with what is called now “historical semantics”
- ❖ In 1900 there appeared Bréal’ s book *Semantics: studies in the science of meaning*. It treated semantics as the “science” of meaning

▶ The use of the terms *semantic* and *semantics* in popular language:

- ❖ In newspapers the terms are used to refer to the manipulation of language, e.g. The headlines in *The Guardian* in 1971: “Semantic maneuvers at the Pentagon” and “Homelessness reduced to semantics”.

- ▶ The term *meaning*:
- ▶ The term *meaning* is much more familiar to us all. But the dictionary will suggest a number of different meanings of *meaning*, or, more correctly, of the verb *mean*.
  
- ▶ Some of the common uses of the term *mean*:
- ❖ In the sense of “intend”, e.g. *I mean to be there tomorrow*.
- ❖ Used of signs, both natural and conventional, e.g. *That cloud means thunder* or *A red light means “Stop”*, where “clouds” do not communicate while “traffic lights” do.

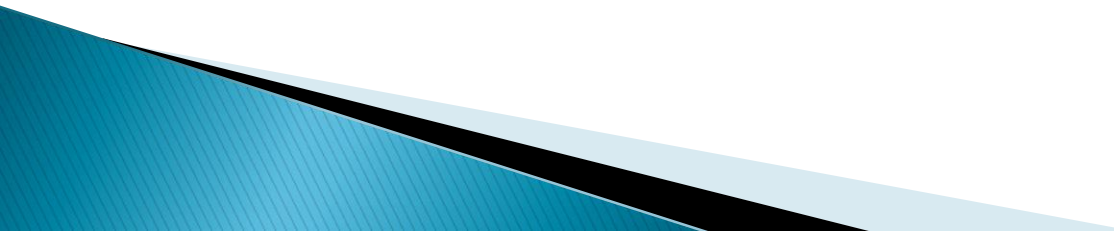


- ❖ Provide definitions by suggesting words or phrases that have the “same” meaning, which is characteristic of dictionaries, e.g. *What does “calligraphy” mean? “Calligraphy” means “beautiful handwriting”*. In stating meaning, we produce a term that is more familiar than the one whose meaning is being questioned.
- ❖ The use of “mean” found in such sentence as “It wasn’t what he said, but what he meant.” Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. This is the case when words fail to mean what they mean, that is, there is some other meaning beside the “literal” meaning of the words, which can be achieved in a number of ways, e.g. intonation and presupposition.

# Semantics and Linguistics

- ▶ Semantics is a component or level of linguistics of the same kind as phonetics or grammar. Nearly all linguists have accepted a linguistic model in which semantics is at one “end” and phonetics at the other, with grammar somewhere in the middle.
- ▶ To explain this further, if language is regarded as an information system, or as a communication system, it will associated a message (the meaning) with a set of signs (the sounds of the language or the symbols of the written text). The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1916:99) referred to these as the SIGNIFIER (signs) and the SIGNIFIED (meaning).

# Does language always communicate a message?

- ▶ Language doesn't always have a message in any real sense, certainly not in the sense of a piece of information.
  - ▶ Part of its function is concerned with social relationships.
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- ▶ A further difficulty with semantics is that meanings do not seem to be stable but to depend upon speakers, hearers and context. Yet if linguistics is scientific, it must be concerned not with specific instances, but with generalizations. For this reason, it is generally assumed that a distinction can be made between the linguistic system and the use made of that system by speakers and hearers.
- ▶ This point was made by de Saussure (1961:30–2) in his distinction between LANGUAGE (*langue*) and SPEAKING (*parole*).
- ▶ This distinction reappeared in Chomsky (1965:4) as COMPETENCE and PERFORMANCE.

- ▶ Both are concerned in excluding what is purely individual and accidental (speaking or performance), and to insist that the proper study of linguistics is language or competence, which is some kind of idealized system.

## Is there a similar distinction within semantics?

- ▶ It goes without saying that we cannot be concerned with purely individual, idiosyncratic, acts.
- ▶ “When I use a word”, Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, “it means what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less” Lewis Carroll (*Through the Looking-Glass*).
- ▶ An individual’s meaning is not part of the general study of semantics. Of course, it is interesting or important for some purposes to see how and why an individual diverges from the normal pattern, e.g. in literature and in psychiatric studies, but it is important to realize that neither the literary nor the psychiatric studies of the individual would be possible without the generalized ‘normal’ patterns to make comparisons with.

## ‘Meaning’ versus ‘Use’

- ▶ We need to make a distinction, then, between what would seem to be the usual meaning of a word or a sentence and the meaning it has in certain specific circumstances.
- ▶ This may be a matter of ‘meaning’ versus ‘use’, or as some philosophers and linguists have suggested, between **SEMANTICS** and **PRAGMATICS**.
- ▶ The most useful distinction, perhaps, is made by Lyons (1977:643) in terms of SENTENCE MEANING, which is directly related to the grammatical and lexical features of a sentence, and UTTERANCE MEANING, which includes all ‘secondary’ aspects of meanings, especially those related to context.
- ▶ **It is this distinction that allows us to ‘SAY’ one thing and ‘MEAN’ another.**

# Semantics in other disciplines

1. Semantics and Pragmatics
2. Semantics and Lexicography
3. Semantics and Discourse Analysis
4. Semantics and Psycholinguistics
5. Semantics and Translation